



Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead



Richard J. Bruckner
Director

HEARING EXAMINER STAFF SUMMARY

**COUNTY PROJECT NO. TR071216-(5)
PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 200900010
ZONE CHANGE NO. 200900012
VESTING TENTATIVE TRACT MAP NO. 071216
CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT NO. 200900126
OAK TREE PERMIT NO. 200900041
PARKING PERMIT NO. 201000002
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW NO. 200900112**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant, Golden Oak Ranch Properties, is proposing to expand an existing 890-acre film production facility called the Golden Oak Ranch ("Ranch"). The proposed expansion is located within the westerly portion of the Ranch which includes an offsite utility corridor ("LADWP Site"), approximately 30 acres in area, owned by the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power ("LADWP"). The expansion consists of the following: a 58-acre Development Area ("Development Area"), including new onsite development associated with a vesting tentative tract map on 44 acres ("Map Site") and approximately 14 acres within the LADWP transmission corridor for two adjacent parking lots. The Map Site would be developed with a maximum of 555,950 square feet of development, including 12 soundstages, six production offices, six mills, six writer/producer bungalows, one warehouse, one commissary, and one administration building with a maximum building height of 60 feet, or, alternatively, in lieu of four soundstages, two mills, and two production offices within the northern portion of the Map Site, an optional single media office building is also proposed, reducing total development to 510,000 square feet; a bridge 220 feet in length spanning Placerita Creek to provide primary access between areas north and south of the creek; a central utility plant located in the southwest corner and an electrical substation located in the northerly corner of the Map Site; parking exceeding Los Angeles County Code requirements is proposed onsite within the Map Site and LADWP Site in the Development Area, or, alternatively additional parking within two Conditional Parking Areas located east of the Development Area; removal of 158 oak trees and encroachment into the protected zone of 82 oak trees; the relocation of the Ranch foreman's mobile home residence from the Map Site to one of two potential sites on the southeastern corner of the Ranch; demolition of an abandoned structure located on the Map Site; vacation of Delden Road located within the Map Site; a 2,000,000-gallon water tank, 40 feet in height, proposed south of Placerita Canyon Road; a trail, approximately 4,600 feet in length, proposed south of Placerita Canyon Road, which would connect to existing trails within Angeles National Forest; and grading in excess of 100,000 cubic yards, including offsite transport and possible night hauling. The Project also proposes infrastructure improvements located onsite and offsite within unincorporated Los Angeles County and the City of Santa Clarita as well as the continuation of existing uses including: outdoor filming

sets on 195 acres, filming backdrop on 637 acres and portions of the Development Area, and agricultural and oil production uses.

REQUIRED ENTITLEMENTS

- General Plan Amendment to amend the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan local plan designation on the 44-acre Area associated with Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 071216 from Hillside Management (HM) and Floodplain/Floodway (W) to Commercial (C).
- Zone Change to change the zoning on the 44-acre Area associated with Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 071216 from A-2-1 (Heavy Agricultural-One Acre Minimum Lot Area) to C-M-DP (Commercial Manufacturing-Development Program).
- Vesting Tentative Tract Map to create 20, or, alternatively 18 lots located on 44 acres of the 890-acre subject property for development of indoor sound stages and associated production, administrative, parking and support facilities in the proposed C-M-DP zone.
- Conditional Use Permit (“CUP”) to authorize a Development Program including: indoor filming studio development on the 44-acre Area associated with Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 071216 in the proposed C-M-DP zone; grading in excess of 100,000 cubic yards with night hauling, relocation of a caretaker mobile home, construction of an electrical distribution substation, construction of a water tank, construction of a trail and trailhead, exemption from certain outdoor night lighting requirements, continuation of permitted existing agricultural and oil production uses, continued operation and maintenance of existing outdoor sets filming ranch on 195 acres with the remaining 637 acres and portions of the Development Area and 30-acre LADWP transmission corridor right-of-way used as filming backdrop, in the proposed C-M-DP and existing A-2-1 and A-2-2 (Heavy Agricultural-Two Acres Minimum Lot Area) zones.
- Oak Tree Permit to authorize removal of 158 oak trees (including 16 heritage trees) in the A-2-1 zone and encroachment into the protected zone of 82 oak trees (including 3 heritage trees) in the A-2-1 and A-2-2 zones.
- Parking Permit to authorize tandem parking, reciprocal parking within the 44-acre Area associated with Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 071216, off-site parking in a 14-acre portion of the LADWP transmission corridor right-of-way, and surplus parking area without paving and striping in the A-2-1 and A-2-2 zones.
- Environmental Assessment No. 200900112. The Initial Study determined that an EIR was required. A Draft Environmental Impact Report has been prepared pursuant to CEQA reporting requirements.

LOCATION AND ACCESS

The Project site is located at 19802 Placerita Canyon Road adjacent to and southeast of State Route 14 (“SR 14”) at Placerita Canyon Road. Primary access is proposed to be located directly across from the northbound SR 14 off-ramp at Placerita Canyon Road.

Existing primary access is located approximately 0.5 mile southeast of SR 14 and would continue to be used for access to the existing outdoor filming ranch and as secondary access for the 58-acre Development Area.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Project Site is located in the Santa Clarita Valley, in unincorporated Los Angeles County and the City of Santa Clarita, approximately 3 miles northeast of the Interstate 5 and State Route 14 interchange and slightly east of State Route 14 at Placerita Canyon Road. The Project Site is comprised of the following areas: the primary 58-acre Development Area (comprised of the 44-acre Area of the requested Vesting Tentative Tract Map and the 14-acre LADWP transmission corridor right-of-way), the Water Tank Area, the Trail Area, the Potential Mobile Home Relocation Areas, and Conditional Parking Areas, all located within the approximately 890-acre Ranch, and the Off-Site Infrastructure Improvement Areas located within unincorporated Los Angeles County and the City of Santa Clarita.

The Development Area is adjacent to and southeast of SR 14 and split into two portions, one north of Placerita Creek and one south of the Creek, comprised of disturbed earth and rock fill from Caltrans construction of SR 14. The proposed 14-acre parking area is located on flat disturbed land mostly under the transmission line right of way owned by LADWP. The remaining existing filming ranch property is comprised of a valley (following Placerita Creek) and a side canyon (following Heil Creek) surrounded by hillsides to the north, west, and east. Oak trees surround most of the perimeter of the developed valley and side canyon set areas, and the majority of the oak trees to be removed are located within the southerly portion of the proposed Development Area. Native and non-native vegetation and disturbed and natural open space areas are located throughout the property. The tank and trail areas are comprised of hilly natural and disturbed land and access to the tank area is via an existing dirt road.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The Department of Regional Planning ("Department") determined by way of an Initial Study and identified in the Notice of Preparation sent to agencies, that an Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") was necessary for the Project. The areas of potential environmental impact addressed in the Draft EIR ("DEIR") include the following:

- Geotechnical Hazards
- Flood Hazards
- Noise
- Water Quality
- Air Quality
- Global Climate Change
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Paleontological Resources
- Agricultural/Forestry Resources
- Visual Qualities
- Traffic, Access, and Parking
- Public Services including: 1) Law Enforcement and 2) Fire Protection
- Utilities and Service Systems including: 1) Water Supply, 2) Wastewater/Sewage Disposal, 3) Solid Waste, and 4) Energy

- Environmental Safety/Fire Hazards
- Land Use

The following areas required no further environmental review as described in the Initial Study.

- Mineral Resources
- Education/Libraries
- Population/Housing/Employment
- Parks and Recreation

Significant and Unavoidable Impacts

As identified in the DEIR, after implementation of the required mitigation measures as enforced by the Project's Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, the Project would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to the environment in the following areas:

Noise

- Construction noise impacts would remain significant and unavoidable during the off-site utility infrastructure installation.
- Short term cumulative construction noise impacts during off-site utility infrastructure installation during construction of Related Projects would be significant and unavoidable.
- Cumulative off-site traffic volumes would result in a significant and unavoidable operational noise impact affecting the existing residential development along Placerita Canyon Road west of Sierra Highway.

Ten noise mitigation measures and project design features are required to mitigate noise impacts to the greatest extent feasible. Avoiding peak hour traffic for construction vehicle trips, keeping mechanical equipment operating below County and City noise standards, use of noise shielding and muffling devices on power construction equipment, and designing central utility plant and pump station so as to keep noise levels below County noise standards, are some of the measures required.

Air Resources

- Construction-related Project regional air quality impacts would be significant and unavoidable.
- Construction-related cumulative regional air quality impacts during Project and Related Projects construction would be significant and unavoidable.

Nine air quality mitigation measures and project design features are required to mitigate air quality impacts to the greatest extent feasible. Compliance with Air Quality Management District rules for fugitive dust control such as regular watering of construction areas and covering stockpiled or trucked soil, limiting idling of trucks, required use of high-rated

pollution control equipped equipment, and limiting the amount of grading per day are some of the required measures.

Traffic, Access, and Parking

- Construction-related cumulative traffic impacts would be significant and unavoidable to the extent that haul trips associated with one other Related Project coincide.

This impact can be avoided if construction does not take place at the same time as construction on another related project. Additionally, 12 mitigation measures and project design features are required to mitigate traffic, access, and parking impacts to the greatest extent feasible. Detailed construction traffic management plans, use of alternative modes of transportation, strategically timed hauling activities, freeway on and off ramp improvements, intersection improvements, and other roadway improvements are incorporated as required measures.

Statement of Overriding Considerations

The value of the Project compared to the remaining significant impacts of the Project after all feasible mitigation has been proposed, would be weighed by the decision makers. A statement of overriding considerations will be required to address the above remaining significant and unavoidable impacts of the Project.

LEGAL NOTIFICATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Pursuant to the provisions of Sections 22.60.174 and 22.60.175 of the County Code, the community was appropriately notified of the Hearing Examiner Hearing by mail, newspaper, property posting, library posting and on the Department's website. Newspaper notices were published in The Signal and La Opinion on May 3, 2012. Notices to property owners located within a 1,000-foot radius of the property boundaries, and to two local libraries, were mailed on May 2, 2012. Notices were verified to be posted on the subject property and were made available on the Department's website on May 3, 2012. On May 3, 2012 a Notice of Completion and Availability ("NOC-NOA") of a DEIR was posted at the County Recorder's office. On May 3, 2012 the NOC-NOA was sent by mail to required agencies including the State Clearing House and other interested parties. The NOC-NOA is also posted on the Project site and on the Department's website.

PREVIOUS CASES/ZONING HISTORY

The film production uses at the Ranch are currently permitted by a CUP issued by the County of Los Angeles. In 1979, Golden Oak Ranch Properties obtained CUP No. 1494 to authorize the use of the Ranch for motion picture sets and the temporary use of wild and domestic animals for filming purposes for a 25-year term. The CUP also allowed up to 600 persons on the Ranch at any one time. Prior to expiration of CUP No. 1494, Golden Oak Ranch Properties applied for a CUP to continue the motion picture set uses on the Ranch. In January 2007, Golden Oak Ranch Properties obtained CUP No. 04-089 to continue using the Ranch for motion picture filming, motion picture set construction, and agricultural activities for 15 years, with the ability to renew the CUP for an additional 15 years. At the same time, the County granted Oak Tree Permit No. 200600032 to Golden Oak Ranch Properties to remove 14 oak trees and permit five encroachments into the protected zone of certain oak trees to relocate the primary site access and driveway in order to meet County

line-of-sight requirements on Placerita Canyon Road. The current request seeks to continue the existing uses and add the additional uses requested.

STAFF EVALUATION

Project consistency with the County of Los Angeles General Plan, compliance with the County Zoning Ordinance and development standards, neighborhood impact and land use compatibility, and evaluation of the applicant's ability to meet all requirements for a Plan Amendment, Zone Change, Vesting Tentative Tract Map, Conditional Use Permit, Oak Tree Permit, and Parking Permit and corresponding burdens of proof as applicable, will be determined subsequent to the Hearing Examiner public hearing. The Hearing Examiner Public hearing is established primarily to receive public testimony on the merits of the Project as analyzed in the Draft EIR prior to Project consideration by the Regional Planning Commission ("Planning Commission") at a later date.

Project Issues

A number of development issues regarding the proposed project were raised by public agencies in response to the Notice of Preparation of an EIR and through the agency Screencheck DEIR review process. These issues have been addressed in the DEIR.

Several issues have been identified as areas of controversy through the public review process regarding the Initial Study/Notice of Preparation, Scoping Meeting, and the current DEIR public review. Comments include issues related to construction noise, construction air quality, construction and operational traffic, loss of oak trees and visual considerations.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

County Department comments and conditions will be finalized subsequent to the Hearing Examiner public hearing and prior to consideration by the Planning Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Members of the Public

Four (4) members of the public provided written comments regarding the project at the time of this report.

Comments in Favor

Four (4) comments in favor of the project were received at the time of this report including one expressing support overall and requesting that peak hour traffic management take into consideration large groups visiting nearby Placerita Canyon Nature Center at peak traffic hours. Another comment also favored the project overall but had concerns about the number of oak tree removals. Comments also expressed support for the economic development benefits of the Project.

Comments Opposed

No comments opposed to the Project were received at the time of this report.

REMAINING PROCEDURES

Since the DEIR public comment period does not close until June 18, 2012, mitigation measures and draft conditions pertaining to the Project will be completed following the Hearing Examiner public hearing. Once the DEIR comment period closes, the Department

will review public comments received, will draft responses to those comments, and draft the Final EIR and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program. Staff will also prepare California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") Findings, draft Findings and Conditions pertaining to the Project related entitlements, and submit documentation to the Planning Commission for consideration prior to the Planning Commission hearing to be set at a future date.

Once the public hearing before the Planning Commission is scheduled and completed and the Planning Commission certifies or rejects the EIR and conceptually approves or denies the entitlements requested, a recommendation is made by the Commission to the Board of Supervisors ("Board") regarding final approval or denial of the requested entitlements. A public hearing will be held before the Board and upon conclusion of the hearing, the Board will make a final decision on whether or not to adopt the EIR and approve or deny the Project entitlement requests.

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6/04/12